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SUBJECT: Pastoralists Gather for Peace in Maikona

REF: A. Nairobi 1259

[B](#). Nairobi 1242

[C](#). Nairobi 1238

[D](#). Nairobi 551

[E](#). 08 Nairobi 2721

Summary

[1](#)1. Kenya's upper Eastern province continues to be caught in a cycle of inter-tribal violence driven by competition for scarce resources. Two of the opposing groups, the Borana and Gabra, are closely related communities that speak the same language and intermingle along the Kenyan-Ethiopian border. Poor infrastructure, weak governance, and sparse population density in this region mean that community-based dialogue using traditional peacemaking mechanisms may be one of the more effective ways to help stabilize the situation. A Mission Team recently traveled to Maikona, in the northwestern reaches of Kenya's Eastern province, for a peace gathering that brought together members of the Borana and Gabra communities from Kenya and Ethiopia to discuss violence and boundary issues. We will continue to promote peacemaking efforts by community members' customary justice and governance systems of this marginalized region, and support local elected officials in their efforts to play a constructive role in promoting peace in ways that respect the customary value systems that have a high potential to resolve conflicts efficiently. End Summary.

Background on Peace Gatherings

[1](#)2. Kenya's upper Eastern province continues to be caught in a cycle of inter-tribal violence driven by competition for scarce resources. Two of the opposing groups, the Borana and Gabra, are closely related communities that speak the same language and intermingle along the Kenyan-Ethiopian border. Both groups are Cushitic and closely related to Ethiopia's Oromo people. The presence in this area of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), a guerilla and political organization that has been fighting against the Government of Ethiopia since 1973, adds a political dimension to the conflict. The July 2005 massacre of 60 Gabra (including 21 children) in the relatively well-watered and pastured area of Turbi, Kenya was widely blamed on the Borana and the OLF and served as a tipping point for long-simmering tensions between the two groups. After a brutal revenge attack by the Gabra during the same month that left ten churchgoers (including two children)

dead, 6,000 people from the Turbi area fled their homes. Gabra and Borana elders from Kenya and Ethiopia eventually started a peace initiative, which eventually led to a ceasefire in November 2008. The agreement, which became known as the Dukana-Dillo Declaration (named after the two villages that came together to negotiate the deal) details the community-agreed and -imposed penalties for stealing animals, injuring or killing a person, inciting violence, or protecting the culprit of animal thefts. (Note: The Government of Kenya is beginning to recognize the utility of such traditional conflict resolution mechanisms, and established the National Steering Committee on Peace-Building and Conflict Management (NSC) to provide policy direction and support to District Peace Committees throughout Kenya. See refs A, C, and http://www.lexisnexis.com/documents/pdf/20080_924043951_large.pdf End Note.)

13. In order to spread peace along the border, in June the elders who initiated the peace initiative hosted 130 people from Ethiopia and Kenya in the Kenyan border village of Dukana to hear about the initiative. The Dukana gathering included men, women, and youth from Dire, Miyo, Dillo and Teltele districts in Ethiopia and from Chalbi and Marsabit districts in Kenya. By the end of the gathering, elders, participants, and representatives from both the Kenyan and Ethiopian governments fully endorsed the Dukana-Dillo accords. (Note: After the Dukana

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meeting, Kenyan Gabra from Forole were given immediate access to Borana boreholes in Magado, Ethiopia. End Note.)

Participation at Maikona Gathering

14. The Maikona gathering, which took place July 17-19, was planned as a way to cement the peace process more firmly in Kenya and Ethiopia by inviting representatives from the Sololo, Walda, Uran, and Rawan settlements, who did not participate in Dukana. (Note: Many of the pastoralists and Ethiopian government representatives blamed their non-participation in Dukana on pressure by members of the OLF living in those communities. End Note.) Each of these communities sent representatives to the Maikona gathering. Also present were representatives of the Samburu and Rendille communities who are struggling to deal with their own inter-communal conflicts with the Borana and Somalis in Isiolo and Samburu Districts (refs A, B, C, and D). A few Turkana representatives were also present, and keen to replicate the process. In total, 250 pastoralists and community members attended the meeting, including more than 40 women and 20 youth. Several high-level politicians and local, district, and provincial officials attended as well.

15. While the UK-funded Democracy, Growth and Peace for Pastoralists (DGPP) provided some infrastructure support for the gathering, members of the invited communities organized the event and carried it out in a traditional manner. Elders led the proceedings, women provided entertaining songs and dances (and participated freely in the proceedings), and translators ensured that observers and the media could understand the proceedings.

16. Seated under the shade of an acacia tree,

individuals from each of the communities stood to share their perspectives on the violence and how to move forward. After considerable debate, it was agreed that past wrongs and cross-accusations would be put aside and a collective way forward sought. Several speakers talked about the difficulty of attending such meetings because people back home assumed that the attendees went solely for the purpose of collecting per diem, an unfortunate backlash to years of well-meaning but marginally effective NGO-sponsored workshops. (Note: With the exception of some of the Kenyan government representatives, who received high-paying per diems, and overnight travelers, who received enough for lodging and food on the road, Maikona's participants funded their own travel and stayed in tents set up by an outfitter at the site. Traditional meals were also provided to participants. End Note.) Numerous women spoke, including one of the chiefs, and seemed to appreciate their inclusion in the discussion. The youth participants seemed well-versed on the issues and shared ideas during meals and sideline discussions, but none were recognized to speak during formal deliberations. In addition to the community members, there was also representation from the Kenya Commercial Bank (KCB) and Equity Bank. KCB set up a booth and provided music one night and an Equity Bank representative spoke on how peace attracts investment. Many of the community speakers encouraged the others in attendance to implement any agreement to come from the meeting.

Outcome of Maikona Gathering

¶7. The two elders presiding over the meeting were a Kenyan Gabra, Gadana Molo Galgallo and an Ethiopian Borana, Nura Dida, who served as the respective chairmen of the Pastoralist Shade Initiative (Kenya) and the Oromia Pastoralists' Association (Ethiopia). Meeting organizers aimed to provide a forum for dialogue between the Gabra and Borana, while also giving the Samburu and Rendille observers who were present an idea of whether or not the process could work further south in the Isiolo/Samburu districts, and west in the Turkana/Pokot areas.

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¶8. Neighboring tribes discussed points of contention in detail during breakout sessions (e.g., Kenyan Gabra and Rendille, Kenyan Samburu, Turkana, and Massai, and Ethiopian Boran and Gabra.) The chairmen summarized the main problems as each group saw them, potential solutions to those problems, and implications of those solutions. Each group had very similar concerns. First, every group agreed that the overall conflict was causing death and loss of property and that it was the responsibility of the groups to restrain the 'bad ones' in their ranks. Secondly, there was general agreement that national and tribal boundary disputes were a source of problems and resource conflicts. There also seemed to be general agreement on removing armed individuals from the border regions.

¶9. After being agreed to at Maikona, and organized with a sense of urgency, another gathering was held within a week. Held at Walda in Sololo District, Kenya, near Turbi and Moyale, the gathering convened to address the remaining Borana-Gabra 'conflict fault line,' in the Sololo-Turbi area. About 160 pastoralists gathered on July 27-28 and joined other Borana and Gabra communities living along the Ethiopia-Kenya border. They arrived at a peace

declaration which included the traditional justice mechanisms outlined in the Dukana-Dillo Declaration (summarized above in para 2). The communities also agreed to start sharing grazing and water resources. By July 29, around 400 cattle, 1500 sheep and goats and many camels from Turbi were using the water at Rawan, near Walda - a 10km distance, rather than the 80km they had had to travel since the Turbi massacre in 2005. The Walda gathering was organized by community leaders without external support apart from limited assistance in transporting some participants. (Note: none of the Walda attendees received any allowance, including senior government officials. End Note.)

¶10. The final agreement, known as the Maikona-Walda Peace Declaration, includes a statement of peace between the Borana and Gabra and a pronouncement of equal access to resources between the two groups. The Declaration also establishes an elder's committee to ensure that the communities engage and interact, an agreement to return animals that stray from one community to another, an acknowledgement of the government's purview over boundary issues, and a recognition that the tribes can sort out their own day-to-day issues without the help of government.

Politicians' role in the Process

¶11. Local politicians are widely believed to support inter-tribal violence routinely (ref E). The 2006 crash of an aircraft in Marsabit carrying seven Kenyan officials (including five Kenyan MPs) to a peace gathering served as a major setback to the inclusion of lawmakers in the peace process. Ref E discussed the Ambassador's efforts in November 2008 to get local politicians re-engaged in promoting peace. While Minister for the Development of Northern Kenya and Other Arid Lands, Mohammed Elmi and Laisamis District MP Francis Chachu, a Gabra, were receptive and supportive from the beginning, Marsabit District MP and Assistant Minister for the Development of Northern Kenya and Other Arid Lands Hussein Sasura, a Borana, proved more difficult to win over. However, Sasura since has become a vocal supporter of inter-ethnic peace processes. By the time Maikona organizers invited them to attend the July gathering, all three were publicly supportive of peace.

¶12. On the first day of the Maikona gathering, Elmi spoke on the important conditions for peace, including: politicians playing an active role, the State protecting its citizens, policy coordination with the border state (Ethiopia), and the community's responsibility to change attitudes and ways of thinking that promote violence. He also stated that the communities will not have peace until it becomes unacceptable for the sons of the communities to kill and then be allowed to come home

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and celebrated.

¶13. Sasura also spoke at the Maikona gathering and encouraged the pastoralists gathered to move beyond words and act on the peace initiative at home. He emphasized the role of limited resources in exacerbating the conflict and explained to the group that conflict was keeping the region from developing.

¶14. Chachu applauded the Maikona gathering's attendees for organizing the July 17-19 event, since

the elders, and not the government or the MPs, had organized it. He explained that the MPs from the greater Marsabit District wanted to see peace and were already 'going around preaching peace' in their constituencies. Chachu also stated that the elected officials in the region were ready to strengthen the peace process that the pastoralists had started. Like Sasura, Chachu expressed to the crowd that without peace, there would be no development. (Note: The Ambassador is planning to provide another platform for the MPs to hit the 'no development without peace' theme by traveling north again to announce OFDA's recently-launched Pastoralist livelihoods program. End Note.)

¶15. Representatives from the Maikona and Walda Peace Gatherings traveled to Nairobi for a meeting with the NSC (para 2) on August 3. The NSC has shown great interest in affirming and supporting the expansion and deepening of such community-driven peace processes. The NSC oversees the Kenyan representative of the IGAD-based specialized institution CEWARN - the Conflict Early Warning and Response Network, headquartered in Addis Ababa.

Comment

¶16. There are several promising aspects to this series of gatherings that bode well for conflict mitigation in Kenya's arid north: the broad community ownership in the process (e.g., participants generated their own funding for food and transport, and women and youth attended the proceedings), the positive comments by politicians encouraging peace, and the immediate benefits to communities once such peace agreements are concluded, such as the water access granted to the Gabra by the Borana after the signing of the Dukana-Dillo Declaration. What remains to be seen is how enforceable and enduring these agreements will be once participants return home.

¶17. There are levels of complexity to this dialogue we were unable to see or evaluate. For example, it was apparent at certain sensitive times that local interpreters left out some of the participants' remarks to ensure the proceedings were spun in a positive way for the outside observers (cross-community accusations of OLF recruitment, and financing of revenge attacks by remote wealthy members of sub-clans, for example). There were also rumblings of resentment about the 'typical behavior' of politicians, but it appeared that community leaders took control of the peace process and asserted the role of the customary governance systems. (Note: Kenyan MPs appeared late on the first day of the meeting, reneged on a promise to stay for the entire gathering, and attempted to influence the date of the Walda gathering. Some participants interpreted the attempt to change the date as a way for the politicians to exert control over who could participate at Walda. As politicians are more often criticized for their complete absence from such discussions, we view their presence and involvement as a net positive. End Note.) Finally, the lack of youth participation in the formal dialogue may not have provided the peaceful outlet for frustration and social inclusion they so desperately seek. Youth engagement needs to be addressed, as does the identification and bringing to justice of the spoilers and criminal elements.

¶18. Nevertheless, we see the Maikona gathering, and its ilk, as a positive step forward in stabilizing Northern Kenya's security environment that other

warring communities, the Samburu and Rendille in particular, may try to replicate (see Ref A). These developments take place in the context of intensive efforts by the Ambassador and Mission team to encourage conflict resolution in this region (Ref E). We will continue to encourage both the political class and local communities to engage in dialogue to stop the cycle of violence. End

Comment.
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